National visitation on the Western Front: A study of some Great War cemeteries

Dr Caroline Winter
University of Ballarat
Trier 2012

Cemeteries & memorials built by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

1914-1918 war dead in CWGC care (ID burials and memorials)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>887,748</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>74,189</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>64,988</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>61,986</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>18,051</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>9,477</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,116,439</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Method

- Sample of 66 cemeteries – convenience
- Collection of data from visitor books
- Projection of entries for one year
- Min days used for projection = 114 days
- Large and small sites accessed
- Cluster analysis used to group cemeteries into similar visitation magnitudes
Method cont.

• Small cemeteries may not have a book
• Estimates indicate that as few as 5% of visitors sign the book. This is based upon estimates of actual visitation at Tyne Cot (228,027) and Lijssenthoek (29,509) by Vandaele & Monballyu (2008)

La Belle Alliance
-no book-

Nationality of VBE authors

• 56.4% = UK
• 14.2% = Australia
• 6.9% = Canada
• 3.7% = Belgium
• 2.7% = N/Lands
• 2.0% = NZ
• 1.5% = France
• 0.9% = USA
• 2.1% = Other (x58)
• 9.6% = Not indicated

Each site is unique

• It is well known that cemeteries can be read as text to indicate their role during the war (Mosse, 1990; Laqueur, 1994)
• Current day settings may influence visitation independently of historic context
• Eg location near larger sites, location, aesthetics, identified burials, large size
Very high visitation sites – Clusters 7, 6, 5, (Table 1)

• Cl. 7 (n=1) Tyne Cot - “everyone” visits
• Cl.6 (n=2) Lijssethoek, Essex Farm
• Cl. 5 (n=4) Ramparts, VC Corner, Ploegsteert Mem. Sanctuary Wood

• Special “features” that tend to attract visitors from many nations: large size, location, John McCrae, trenches, national memorials
Fig 1 – Cluster 4 (n=13)
Australia, Canada, New Zealand

- This is the next level of visitation and where national preferences begin to be more clearly shown
  - tends to reflect major battle sites
- Canada at Vimy Ridge
- Australia at Polygon Wood, Pozieres
- New Zealand at Caterpillar valley
Figure 1. Cluster 4: Projected VBE for Australia, Canada, New Zealand

Cluster 3 – similar national preferences shown
- Canada at Adanac
- Australians at Toronto
- NZ at Prowse Point
Non British Commonwealth VBE
Fig 2, Cluster 2

- Highest in cemeteries close to one’s own country – reflects French, Belgian and Netherlands visitation
- Lower French VBE due to much higher proportion of Belgian sites in this study
- No clear pattern for other nations – may be an effect of tour guides or presence of large tour groups. More detailed study needed.

Figure 2. Cluster 2: Projected VBE for non British Commonwealth countries
Cluster 1 - Smallest VBE

- Martinpuich British Cemetery (115)
- Blauwe-poort Farm Cem. (90)
- Bazentin Le Petit Comm. Cem. Ext (185)
- Div. Cem Dickebusch Rd Vlamertinge (283)
- La Brique #1 (91)
- Morchies Military Cem (163)

- Not necessarily small cemeteries

Cluster 1 (Table 2) – very small visitation

- Tend to be small sites, but not always the case – often these sites are located off the beaten track. There are exceptions however.

- ALL are visited

- ‘Other’ nations visit most of these sites

Conclusions

- The CWGC cemeteries provide a highly visible marker of the Great War, often in the absence of other evidence
- Visitation is the enactment of memory – remembrance
Conclusions

- The link between national preferences and the landscape are evident for a range of reasons:
- The physical location of the dead – according to Tuan, creates sacred sites
- Large battles and cemeteries may also be marked by national monuments
- Convenience – to home
- Visitation also reflects an industrialised European war and the need to respect all of those involved